

MARIA CANTWELL
WASHINGTON



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

October 23, 2003

D. Robert Lohn
Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries
7600 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115

Dear Mr. Lohn:

I am writing to request your assistance regarding the plight of orca L98, also as known as Luna, an individual orca that has been separated from his pod for over two years. Luna's behavior in isolated Nootka Sound has grown increasingly erratic, endangering himself and nearby boaters. This is clearly an unsustainable situation and we must commit our best efforts to reuniting Luna with his fellow Southern Resident orcas.

As you know, my office has stayed in close contact with NOAA Fisheries, Washington state and Canadian officials, and other stakeholders to monitor both the health of the Southern Resident population and Luna's unique situation. I was pleased that officials from both the U.S. and Canada recently endorsed the comprehensive reintroduction plan, developed by a scientific panel of U.S. and Canadian experts. I understand that the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) is currently reviewing proposals from organizations interested in helping relocate the animal, and there is concern about available funding and timing to undertake such a plan.

I appreciate NOAA Fisheries' effective and timely use of \$750,000 of fiscal year 2003 appropriations that I secured to fund research into the factors contributing to the current population decline and better understanding the distribution of the existing population. I am pleased with the progress being made to develop of a conservation plan to define the goals for recovery and identify specific measures to help restore the population of resident killer whales. I also want to especially commend NOAA Fisheries for its role in the successful reuniting of A73 with its native population in Canadian waters.

Earlier this year, we were able to secure a \$1.5 million appropriation for research and conservation in the Senate version of the fiscal year 2004 Commerce, Justice, and State appropriations bill. If included in the final version of the bill, I believe that a portion of these funds should be used to help implement a cooperative Canadian and U.S. reintroduction plan. I recognize that this will require DFO to work with NOAA Fisheries in a timely manner to develop a joint U.S./Canada led plan and agreement on how the two governments would contribute respective resources and operate cooperatively in Canadian waters to relocate Luna. The successful collaborative effort to save A73 in 2002 should serve as the guide to the level of funding and type of resources I believe the two governments and the whale advocacy community should contribute to this important endeavor.

Thank you for your efforts in this matter, I appreciate your prompt attention to this issue. By continuing to work cooperatively, I am confident we can reunite Luna and stem the loss of these majestic regional icons.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maria Cantwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator